

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM USDEL SECRETARY IN JERUSALEM
TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTO 09008

EXDIS

FOR AMBASSADOR FROM SAUNDERS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS)

SUBJ: SECRETARY'S STATEMENT ON HOUSE CUT-OFF OF SYRIAN AID

1. FOLLOWING IS A ROUGH PARAPHRASE OF THE MAIN POINTS MADE BY SECRETARY VANCE AUGUST 4 IN A CLOSED SESSION OF THE HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE. IN RESPONDING TO A REQUEST FOR HIS JUDGMENT ON THE ACTION OF THE HOUSE IN DELETING FUNDS FOR THE SYRIAN AID PROGRAM, THE SECRETARY MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS: THIS IS A VERY SERIOUS MISTAKE. SYRIA IS GOING TO BE A KEY FACTOR IN ANY ARAB-ISRAELI SETTLEMENT. ALTHOUGH SYRIA HAS OPPOSED THE SADAT INITIATIVE, ASSAD WANTS A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE. SYRIA CONTINUES TO ACCEPT RSOLUTION 338. SYRIA IS ALSO PLAYING A KEY ROLE IN LEBANON, AND WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE REALITIES OF THAT FACT. IF SYRIAN TROOPS WITHDREW FROM LEBANON NOW, THERE WOULD BE A BLOOD-BATH OR PARTITION. WE DEPLORE THE EXCESSES WE HAVE SEEN IN BEIRUT IN RECENT DAYS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THIS IS A TWO-WAY STREET AND WE KNOW THERE HAVE BEEN PROVOCATIONS. SYRIA HAS BEEN ON THE SIDELINES OF THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, BUT THEIR CRITICISM HAS BEEN LESS VOCAL RECENTLY. IT WOULD BE A BAD MISTAKE TO DRIVE THEM INTO
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THE HANDS OF THE EXTREMISTS OR OF THE SOVIETS. THEY HAVE BEEN KEEPING THEIR DISTANCE FROM BOTH. IT IS A PARTICULARLY BAD TIME FOR THIS ACTION FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS. ONE OF THESE IS THAT AMBASSADOR SEELYE WILL BE PRESENTING HIS CREDENTIALS IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS. REALLY, IT IS A MUST THAT WE TURN THIS ACTION AROUND.

2. CONGRESSMAN SOLARZ, IN RESPONDING, NOTED THAT HE HAD VOTED AGAINST THE HOUSE ACTION IN ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT DECISIONS HE HAS MADE SINCE COMING TO CONGRESS. HE SUGGESTED THAT AMBASSADOR SEELYE SHOULD MAKE CLEAR TO THE SYRIANS THAT THIS ACTION WAS JUST PART OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS AND THE FINAL DECISION HAS YET TO BE MADE. HOWEVER, A WAY MIGHT BE FOUND TO POINT OUT TO THE SYRIANS THAT IT WOULD BE ENORMOUSLY HELPFUL TO THOSE IN THE CONGRESS WHO ARE PREPARED TO ARGUE FOR THE SYRIAN AID PROGRAM IF SOMETHING COULD HAPPEN SOON WHICH WOULD DEMONSTRATE THAT THE RELATIONSHIP HAS PRACTICAL ADVANTAGES FOR BOTH SIDES. HE PARTICULARLY SUGGESTED THAT A SYRIAN DECISION TO RELEASE THE 51 YOUNG SYRIAN WOMEN WHO HAVE MADE APPLICATION TO COME TO THE UNITED STATES WOULD HAVE A MORE HELPFUL EFFECT.

3. THE ABOVE IS PROVIDED FOR YOUR BACKGROUND AND FOR YOU TO DRAW ON IN ANY WAY YOU THINK USEFUL.
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